

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS ROME 000624

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IT](#) [EUN](#) [ITALIAN](#) [POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: PM BERLUSCONI SAYS HE IS A CANDIDATE FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

1. DURING A PRESS CONFERENCE FEBRUARY 17, ITALIAN PM BERLUSCONI SAID HE WOULD BE A CANDIDATE IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY (EP) ELECTIONS IN JUNE, BUT THAT, WIN OR LOSE, HE WOULD REMAIN IN HIS POSITION AS PRIME MINISTER.

ITALY HAS NO LAW THAT PREVENTS A MEMBER OF GOVERNMENT FROM RUNNING FOR AN EP SEAT, BUT THE EU COUNCIL'S 1976 ACT ON ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (ADOPTED BY ITALY IN 1977) DECREES THAT THE OFFICE OF MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE OFFICE OF MEMBER OF A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT.

2. IF ELECTED, BERLUSCONI WILL THEREFORE HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE EP AND HIS NATIONAL GOVERNMENT POSITION. IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE THAT BERLUSCONI SAID HE WILL OPT TO REMAIN AS ITALY'S PM. BECAUSE ITALY'S EP ELECTORAL LAW IS BASED ON PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, HE WOULD THEN BE REPLACED IN THE EP BY THE PERSON ON HIS PARTY TICKET WHO RECEIVED THE MOST VOTES AMONG THOSE WHO WERE NOT ELECTED. BERLUSCONI'S STRATEGY FOR BECOMING A CANDIDATE IS SIMPLE -- TO WIN MORE VOTES FOR HIS PARTY, FORZA ITALIA (FI). IN THAT VEIN, IT SHOULD BE VIEWED IN THE CONTEXT OF EU COMMISSION PRESIDENT PRODI'S MUCH-PUBLICIZED DECISION TO "LEAD" THE ITALIAN CENTER-LEFT OPPOSITION'S TICKET FOR THE EP ELECTIONS WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY SERVING OUT HIS TERM ON THE COMMISSION. (COMMENT: BERLUSCONI ISN'T THE ONLY ITALIAN POLITICIAN WITH A FLEXIBLE INTERPRETATION OF WHAT CONSTITUTES A 'CONFLICT OF INTEREST'.)

3. ITALY'S ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD ON JUNE 12-13, PRIMARILY FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, BUT ALSO FOR SEVERAL LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS. THE GOI IS IN THE PROCESS OF AMENDING ITS ELECTORAL LEGISLATION TO CONFORM WITH EU REQUIREMENT AND TO ACCOMMODATE EU ENLARGEMENT IN MAY, WHEN ITALY'S EP SEATS WILL DROP TO 78 FROM 87. THE CURRENT LAW IS BASED ON PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, WITH ITALY DIVIDED INTO FIVE CONSTITUENCIES -- NORTH-WEST (23 SEATS), NORTH-EAST (16 SEATS), CENTER (17 SEATS), SOUTH (21 SEATS), AND THE ISLANDS (10 SEATS). SEPTTEL WILL ANALYZE THE STRATEGY AND OUTLOOK FOR THE CENTER-RIGHT GOVERNING COALITION AND THE CENTER-LEFT OPPOSITION IN THE RUN-UP TO THESE ELECTIONS.

SKODON

NNNN

2004ROME00624 - Classification: UNCLASSIFIED